

**Margaret's Black History Museum:** During the Jim (Jane) Crow one hundred year era from Civil War Reconstruction 1865 to the 1965 Civil Rights Movement, only thirty museums featuring African American culture and history existed in the U.S. They were located primarily at universities with a significant African-American enrollment, as well as at libraries in the South. Only three were independent, nonprofit free standing African American museums: One was Margaret's.

Margaret Taylor Burroughs (1917-2010) was born in St. Rose, Louisiana. At the age of five, she moved with her parents to Chicago as part of the Great Migration. In Chicago Margaret attended Englewood High School where she met Charles White. With White, in 1932 when she was just fifteen, she formed the Art Craft Guild (a group of students at Chicago's School of the Art Institute).

She received her Elementary Teacher's Certificate from Normal College (now Chicago State) in 1937. A few years later at age twenty-two, with other South Side artists, she founded the South Side Community Arts Center, the first black art museum in the United States. The center raised funds for a year, purchased the old Comiskey Mansion on South Michigan Avenue, and received renovation funds from the Federal Art Program (FAP) of the Works Projects Administration (WPA) under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In a ceremony broadcasted nationwide on CBS radio, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt dedicated the building in 1941, a year after it opened.

Margaret completed her Bachelor of Art degree in 1946 from the School of the Art Institute Chicago and began teaching in Chicago public elementary schools. She then taught at DuSable High School, where she stayed for twenty-three years, and then taught at Kennedy-King College.



In 1945, TIME magazine reproduced her art print titled "Two Girls," and in 1947 she published her first children's book, *Jasper the Drummer Boy*. She continued to write additional children's books and poetry. Her most famous was the 1968 volume entitled *What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black?*, largely about the effects of racism on African-American children. And in 1970 she published a second volume of poems, *Africa, My Africa*. She earned her Master of Fine Art Education degree in 1948, also from SAIC.

In 1949 she married Charles Gordon Burroughs, poet and founder of the Associated Negro Press. His organization, modeled on the Associated Press, played an important role in the coordination of African American newspapers throughout the United States. With Charles, she hosted salon-style gatherings in their home and studio. Participants included Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, Margaret Walker, Richard Wright, and Paul Robeson.

During this period between the Great Depression, the Harlem Renaissance and the early 1950s, blacks and whites socialized and worked together for the common good, and Burroughs mingled freely between cultures. Her slogan “Black and White—Unite and Fight” championed this racial harmony. But McCarthyism and the Red Scare that fueled fear of diversity in many American people, virtually ended this fellowship between the races, and her association with people like Paul Robeson induced Burroughs to take an extended leave of absence from her teaching post in 1952.

But the gatherings at the Burroughs’ home continued and spurred the establishment of a 1961 museum they named the Ebony Museum of Negro History and Art. With Ebony, after years of wanting to bring black history to the forefront in Chicago, she and her husband, with about 100 items in their living room, unofficially planted the seeds for what would become a thriving and exceptional museum.

And when the collections and activities outgrew their residence, Mr. and Dr. Burroughs moved Ebony to Washington Park and renamed it the DuSable Museum to honor Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, considered the first black man and permanent citizen of what would become the city of Chicago. On October 25, 1968, DuSable was officially recognized as the founder of Chicago by the city and the state of Illinois.

The DuSable Museum grew to become an internationally recognized resource for African American art. Margaret’s vision of the institution was to document, archive, preserve, showcase and teach African American history to all Black people especially children. It hosts educational programs and houses a permanent collection of more than thirteen thousand artifacts, artworks and books. The DuSable is the oldest museum of its type in the United States.

Individually, Margaret’s exceptional skill as a printmaker earned her a place in art history; uniquely in African American art history. Her prints create evocative images of African-American culture and have been exhibited in prominent museums and galleries globally. She was an artist, educator and institution-builder who received many awards and recognitions.

In 1975 she received the President's Humanitarian Award from President Gerald Ford and in 1977 was distinguished as one of Chicago's Most Influential Women by the *Chicago Defender*. President Jimmy Carter appointed her a member of the National Commission on African American History and Culture in 1980. During that decade she served on Chicago’s Board of Education and was appointed by Chicago’s Mayor Harold Washington to serve on the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners. February 1, 1986 was proclaimed "Dr. Margaret Burroughs Day" in Chicago by Mayor Washington.

In 2015, a 29.75-acre lakefront section of Chicago’s famous Burnham Park on the southern shores of Lake Michigan was named the “Dr. Margaret T. Burroughs Beach and Park.” That same year she also was inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame.

Burroughs was continuously active in the museum that she founded in 1961, and served as a consultant to other museums that have patterned themselves after the DuSable. As of 1991, about 150 African American museums had been established in thirty-seven states. The chairwoman of the DuSable Museum's board of trustees in 2010 stated: "Not everybody can build an institution that becomes a road map for other ethnic groups around the world to emulate, an institution that is designed to impact lives."



In the fall of 2016, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture will open on the Mall in Washington, D.C. Margaret, who passed away on November 21, 2010, will see it from above with Charles who passed away in 1994.

Hear Dr. Burroughs read: *What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black?*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEwU86r-nTo>

Sources: <http://www.artic.edu/aic/resources/resource/982>;  
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